



EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE

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news digest

92040D

Episcopal team observes Russian Church 'worshiping on the ashes of atheism'

A team of Episcopal communicators returned from an eight-day visit to Moscow with strong impressions that the Russian Orthodox Church is overwhelmed but excited by the challenges it faces to rebuild thousands of churches and to inaugurate educational and social service programs.

The largest national church in the world, with about 70 million members, is "worshiping on the ashes of atheism" following the collapse of communism. Interviews with church leaders revealed a determination to begin a "new era of apostolic service to the Russian people" but also a frustration with evangelism by groups from the outside. They contended that outsiders don't understand the "unique soul" of the Russian people and employ techniques that draw the curious more than the faithful.

The visit is part of a series of exchanges between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Episcopal Church stemming from a trip by the presiding bishop in 1989. (Page 6)

92041D

Restoration of Russian monastery is sign that 'gates of hell' did not prevail

Four monks, two deacons, and several novices are slowly reclaiming Russia's second-oldest monastery after seven decades of deliberate abuse--one example of the immense challenges and opportunities facing the Russian Orthodox Church.

Founded in 1380 by Prince Dimitri Donskoi after his defeat of the Tartars on the nearby Plains of Kukilovo, St. Nikolai Monastery was seized by

Communist bureaucrats after the revolution in 1917. During a long season of spiritual hibernation, the monastery was desecrated; stripped of all religious artifacts and converted into a public latrine, a hospital for persons with venereal diseases, and living quarters for 200 families.

Monasteries have always been havens, and they represent Russia because they were the spiritual and fortress centers of towns and communities, according to the leaders of the religious community who are restoring the monastery. "Monasteries have always survived against the gates of hell," they said. (Page 10)

92042D

Protestants in Moscow provide meals and caring atmosphere for the vulnerable

The American Protestant Church in Moscow is sponsoring soup kitchens to help elderly pensioners through a difficult winter. The parish contracts to provide the meals for about 15 cents apiece, and volunteers from the international community serve them.

"This is not simply a matter of providing food," said the Rev. John Melin, a Lutheran who serves the parish. "In serving we are also blessed, sharing some stories of their faith and struggle." The program is being duplicated by other churches and humanitarian agencies.

As news of the program spreads, donations are arriving from churches in the United States, including All Angels Episcopal Church in Spearfish, South Dakota. (Page 11)

92043D

Locked in their churches for 70 years, Russian Christians reach out to society

Russian churches are packed with worshipers these days, and after 70 years of persecution, the church is able to reach out to society. A team of Episcopal communicators attended divine liturgy during a recent visit to Moscow and then participated in a procession through the streets of Moscow to open a newly renovated Sunday school--activities that were forbidden until very recently.

"Russians cannot exist without the church, without a spiritual life--that is their glory," author Suzanne Massie told the group in a briefing session.

"Russians are searching through the rubble of communism for their lost souls." Massie said that only the church, with its "unbroken link throughout Russian history," will be able to help Russians find their identity in the midst of so much political and social chaos. (Page 13)

92046D

New dean at National Cathedral calls for building effort of 'ministry and outreach'

The new dean of the Washington National Cathedral, the Very Rev. Nathan Baxter, called on the cathedral community to begin a new building effort of expanded mission and outreach at a press conference prior to his installation on February 13. "After 83 years of building stone upon stone, we are shifting our emphasis to the building of our ministry and outreach in this community and the nation," Baxter said.

Baxter also said that the cathedral, which sits on the highest hill overlooking the seat of government, must do more to address the role of religion in dealing with national issues. "We will not slack from our responsibility to address the role of religious faith in helping our nation deal with and respond to the social, political, and moral challenges of our times."

Lay leaders and clergy from across the nation and the Church of England participated in Baxter's installation ceremony, a service that blended the sound of Scottish bagpipes, African drums, the cathedral carillon, and liturgical elements that can be traced back to fourth-century England. (Page 15)

92047D

Spong testifies on behalf of gay priest in Toronto trial

Celibacy is not a choice that the church can impose on its priests but a calling that must be freely accepted, Bishop John Spong of Newark told an ecclesiastical court in Canada. Spong testified on behalf of the Rev. James Ferry, a 39-year-old Anglican priest who was on trial for disobeying his bishop and refusing to end a committed, homosexual relationship.

Bishop Terence Findlay of Toronto contended that he was acting in accordance with guidelines of the Canadian House of Bishops by removing Ferry from his pulpit. At issue was the question of a bishop's authority and

discipline as well as the concept of collegiality among the bishops who approved guidelines in 1979 that the Anglican Church of Canada accepts all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, as equal before God. But, the guidelines say, candidates for ordination must agree to abstain from same-sex activity.

Ferry contended that his ministry was not adversely affected because of his relationship and that he continued to be appreciated and valued by many in the congregation. A judgment by the court is pending. (Page 19)

92048D

Connecticut churches using ecumenical baptismal certificates

Leaders of denominations representing more than 2,500 churches in Connecticut have approved an ecumenical baptismal certificate and will encourage pastors to use it instead of a denominational one.

The new certificate is based on the common understanding of baptism described in the World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. "For years, most Christians have recognized one another's baptisms in principle, but in practice the focus was on the particular congregation or at most the communion or 'church' into which one was baptized," said G. Donald Ferree, ecumenical officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

The certificate attests that a person was "baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," an ancient, common formula. On the left side of the certificate is a multicolored design symbolic of the Trinity, Christ, and the water of baptism. (Page 21)

92049D

Roman Catholics want their church, but as Episcopalians

When Roman Catholic Bishop Raphael M. Fliss announced that the 76-year-old church in Conrath, Wisconsin, had to be closed because of a shortage of priests, several angry parishioners suggested that the parish seek affiliation with the Episcopal Church.

Episcopal Bishop William Wantland of Eau Claire reported that members of the Conrath congregation approached an Episcopal priest about

becoming Episcopalians. "We told [members of the congregation] that if there were some theological reasons that would make this desirable for them, and if they would otherwise be without any pastoral care, we would talk to them," Wantland said. "We're not saying that every time you close a parish we will be there to snap it up."

Of the 52 families in the parish, 11 have joined a Roman Catholic church in a nearby town, 15 have expressed a desire to become Episcopalians, and 26 are waiting to see how things turn out, Wantland said. (Page 23)

92050D

Cardinal Cassidy calls for cooperation in evangelizing Europe

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said during an official visit to the United States that the churches of Europe should cooperate in evangelizing Europe.

Cassidy also called for "a spirit of forgiveness" as the churches of Eastern and Central Europe face a changing situation. At a New York news conference he denied that the Vatican's response to the report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue was negative but added that the ordination of women continues to be "a big obstacle in our relationship."

The cardinal made an informal visit to the Episcopal Church Center to meet with Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and open lines of communication. (Page 25)

92040

Episcopal team observes Russian Church 'worshiping on the ashes of atheism'

by James Solheim

A team of six Episcopal communicators returned from an eight-day trip to Moscow with two very strong impressions--the Russian Orthodox Church is overwhelmed but excited by the challenges it faces, but the sociopolitical turmoil is still very threatening.

The team, composed of diocesan and national communicators from across the United States, visited the Moscow area in February at the invitation of the Russian Church and as part of a series of exchanges established after the presiding bishop's official visit in 1989.

The largest national church in the world, with about 70 million members, the Russian Orthodox Church is "worshiping on the ashes of atheism," the team was told. In the last two years, thousands of churches have been returned, but many of them need extensive renovation--at a time when Russian society is reeling from dramatic economic reforms implemented by President Boris Yeltsin in January.

Ending the long period of isolation, former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev recognized that the church was important in attempts to rebuild society--much as Stalin decided he needed the church to rally the people during World War II.

Suzanne Massie, an author who teaches at Harvard's Center for Russian Studies, told the team during a briefing that "the church is the only institution with an unbroken link, and therefore the only source of identity for the Russians."

Massie, one of three Episcopal members of the joint coordinating committee formed to promote relations with the Russian Church, said that "Russians cannot exist without the church, without a spiritual life--that is their glory." But they are now involved in a "poignant effort" to "search through the rubble of Soviet communism for their lost souls."

Second mission to Russian people

That search was painfully obvious during a week of interviews with church leaders. Archbishop Clement, deputy of the department for external relations and host of the visit, said that the Russian Church was beginning a "second mission" to the people of Russia. "Yet we can't make a country

Christian in a day," he said. "There is a great need for new apostles."

The attempt to open thousands of churches at the same time has placed a tremendous strain on the resources of the church. Newly gilded onion domes and crosses rise on the landscape of cities across Russia as a signal of determination by the church to move back to the center of society.

One of the new difficulties in the "new era of apostolic service to the Russian people" is the attempt to build a new basis for compassion. "Russians have been taught that there is no need to love one's neighbor because that is the duty of the party," the archbishop observed. "They were told the party would love them--but now there is no party. So we must rebuild the spirit of charity in the whole society, beginning with believers."

Clement, who spent eight years at the Russian Orthodox cathedral in New York City, extolled the warm and friendly relations between his church and the Episcopal Church. He said that the Episcopal Church "helped and protected us in a difficult time," standing by the Russian Church during the Communist era, when many others assumed that the church had been compromised by the state.

"The church was preserved here--it did the best it could," Clement observed. He was critical of those who see Russia as a fertile missionary field and "come to fight against the Orthodox Church," whose competition will only lead to confrontation. "How can they preach against Orthodoxy--how can that be love?" the archbishop asked. He said that these outsiders did not understand the "unique soul" of the Russian people and employed Western techniques that drew the curious more than the faithful.

When asked about aid from churches around the world, Clement said that the Russian Church did need help, especially in rebuilding churches and establishing social services for a society in a difficult transition. "Provide us with Christian help in the spirit of love," he pleaded.

Partners, not beggars

The team visited the chaotic but energy-filled offices of the newly formed youth movement of the Russian Church. While listening to the exciting plans for addressing the overwhelming needs of Russian young people in a society that has lost its bearings, the team heard some moving stories of change. A young man who was part of a delegation last summer to the Diocese of Washington, for example, told about being raised in an atheist environment. After working in a church-sponsored youth camp to restore church buildings and monasteries, he said that "something began to change inside me."

When asked the inevitable question of how other churches could help,

Father Sergei, who heads the youth movement, offered a somewhat surprising answer. "We need to know each other better before we know what we have to offer each other," he said. "At first, the most important gift was peace. But now we need a new work ethic in this society, so we need practical/technical help. We want to be partners, not beggars."

Among the more urgent ministries, Sergei said that he hoped his office could work with the thousands of youth who were being caught in the conversion of Russian society from military to peacetime occupations. He said that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was largely the result of a failure by society to address the needs of its youth.

A huge educational task

After 70 years of severely limited activities, the church now faces a huge educational task. "In the past we had no opportunity to work directly with people. But now we are establishing Sunday schools, teaching religion in state schools, starting our own parochial schools, and trying to teach ethical and moral principles to a whole society," said John Economtcev, who heads the Russian Church's new department for Christian education.

In the last two years, over 6,000 churches and 50 monasteries have been returned to the Russian Church, presenting an immense challenge. Economtcev, whose department is directly involved in some of the restoration work, stressed the urgency of moving quickly "before further deterioration makes that impossible."

In one of the most openly critical remarks the team heard during its visit, Economtcev said that he had not been encouraged so far by his contacts with ecumenical partners. After many conversations with those who expressed eagerness to help, he was forced to conclude that most of them were "all talk, no action."

Church still facing civil bureaucracy

"It would be hard for you to even imagine what problems we have," said Vladimir Zarkhov of the department of charity and social service during an interview in an office still piled high with the boxes of the previous business tenant. In attempting to provide humanitarian assistance to those in deepest need, the department finds it must contend with the same old bureaucracy that has always made it difficult to get proper documents and permissions. He also deplored the tax bite of 28 percent that the state takes from all charitable contributions within the country.

The church already operates hospitals--for example, St. Xenia's in St. Petersburg, which is supported by the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World

Relief (profile in next ENS). And the state is seeking cooperation with the church in many of the hospitals it operates.

International community sponsors soup kitchens

On the last morning the team visited a soup kitchen sponsored by the American Protestant Church in Moscow. "We knew it was going to be a difficult winter, and we wanted to help," said the Rev. John Melin, a Lutheran who is part of a rotating chaplaincy supported by the National Council of Churches, including the Episcopal Church.

Beginning in December, the parish contracted with several local cafeterias to purchase well-balanced hot meals, and it provided volunteers to serve them. Concentrating specifically on pensioners who were the most vulnerable, the parish soon found itself serving 600 meals a day and fielding inquiries from other churches and organizations eager to sponsor their own soup kitchens.

"Some of these people tell us that it is their only meal of the day--and they don't know if they would survive without it," Melin said. He said that the city government estimated that over 400,000 Muscovites are in desperate need. The government estimates that 80 percent of Russians are below the poverty line, but the figure is closer to 95 percent in Moscow.

While international politics has delayed any substantial food aid to the Russians, Melin said that this small program by the international faith community has been able to serve nourishing meals for less than 15 cents apiece. "Sometimes things are done better at the local level, with local resources," Melin added.

As news of the soup kitchens has spread through the media, the church is receiving gifts from all over the world--including a \$1,700 Christmas offering from Church of All Angels in Spearfish, South Dakota. According to the rector, Bunker Hill, a former member of the parish who is working in Moscow sent along the appeal letter, and the small congregation responded with "surprising enthusiasm and generosity."

Members of the Episcopal Church team of communicators included James Solheim, news director of the Episcopal Church; Frances Antonucci, Diocese of Washington; Dan Crossland, Diocese of Los Angeles; Michael Barwell, Diocese of Southern Ohio; Charles Long, Forward Movement Publications, Cincinnati, Ohio; and D. Scott Miller, Diocese of Olympia.

92041

Restoration of Russian monastery is sign that 'gates of hell' did not prevail

by Michael Barwell

Four monks, two deacons, and several novices are slowly reclaiming Russia's second-oldest monastery after seven decades of deliberate abuse.

"We lost much in these 70 years, and we are still searching for our way," Father Viriamin, superior of St. Nikolai Monastery, said with a sigh. "But God is with us."

Founded in 1380 by Prince Dimitri Donskoi after his defeat of the Tartars on the nearby Plains of Kukilovo, St. Nikolai Monastery was seized by Communist bureaucrats after the revolution in 1917. During a long season of spiritual hibernation, the monastery was desecrated; stripped of all religious artifacts and converted into a public latrine, a hospital for persons with venereal diseases, and living quarters for 200 families.

The monastery is surrounded by Dzerzhinsky, a modern city of 37,000 people named for the founder of the KGB, the former state secret police. Until recently, the city was off limits to most Russians, hidden from the mainstream of Soviet life because it served as a military and nuclear research center. Eight nuclear cooling towers loom over the 30-acre compound that contains the ancient monastery on the Moscow River.

Restoring a few inches at a time

The current restoration of the monastery is but one example of the immense challenges and opportunities facing the Russian Orthodox Church. Evidence of new life is all around, despite the smashed bricks of the main gate and broken and boarded windows in the domeless cathedral.

Inside the former czar's palace, four elderly women meticulously scrub the worn flagstones of the czar's chapel. It is the first building to be restored and the evidence of volunteer devotion is on the walls and ceilings where whitewash--splashed over 15th-century frescoes--is removed a few square inches at a time.

More than 600 believers and curious residents stood in the snow in 1990 when an outdoor Christian liturgy signaled the return of the monastery to the church. Viriamin and Russian Patriarch Alexy II officially reclaimed the desecrated monastery last August.

On weekends, the chapel brims with children and adults attending the

divine liturgy or Sunday schools and religion classes. The monks gleefully reported that they broke through the ice of the Moscow River to baptize babies. "Nobody ever gets sick," they said.

Prayer and potatoes

The resurrected religious community is also responding to material as well as spiritual needs. Father Paul, a colleague of Viriamin who works in the church's Social Services Department, said that the monks plan to build greenhouses this spring so that village children can learn basic farming techniques. They have already planted a potato farm on former monastery lands nearby, and will freely give the potatoes "to poor believers." A new bakery in Moscow is ready to open, and a German company is sponsoring another bakery at the monastery.

Viriamin and Paul are undaunted about the immensity of restoration tasks they are facing. Monasteries have always been havens, and they represent Russia because they were the spiritual and fortress centers of towns and communities. "Monasteries have always survived against the gates of hell," Viriamin said.

--Michael Barwell, director of communication for the Diocese of Southern Ohio, was a member of a delegation of Episcopal journalists that recently visited Russia.

92042

Protestants in Moscow provide meals and caring atmosphere for the vulnerable

by James Solheim

A small knot of elderly women huddled together against the doorway of an apartment building in southwest Moscow, sheltering each other from the raw winds.

They were early for the soup kitchen that would provide many of them with their only daily meal in the winter of discontent that is sweeping away all the familiar foundations of their society, leaving them frightened victims of a

new economic system.

"We knew it was going to be a very difficult winter, especially for the elderly on pensions--and we were determined to do something to help," said the Rev. John Melin, a Lutheran who is chaplain to the American Protestant Church in Moscow.

The Protestant parish, established 30 years ago and served by rotating chaplains chosen through the National Council of Churches, has often felt "isolated and insulated from Russian society," Melin said in an interview. About 25 countries are represented in the parish of diplomats, business people, and international students.

The parish decided it had to find a way to demonstrate its loving concern for the Russian people and identify with their plight. After some discussion with city officials, the parish decided to sponsor soup kitchens at several of the neighborhood lunch cafeterias, paying for the food and its preparation and supplying volunteers to serve it. The city offered to identify those in the neighborhood who were most vulnerable.

Beginning on December 2 with about 150 meals, the program has expanded at several other cafeterias and is now providing over 600 meals a day. As the news spread, Baptists, Russian Orthodox, and Roman Catholics have joined the efforts.

Beginning with gifts from the international community, the program now receives donations from churches abroad, including the \$1,700 Christmas offering from Church of All Angels, an Episcopal parish in Spearfish, South Dakota. The church heard about the program from a former parishioner who is working in Moscow, according to the Rev. Bunker Hill, rector of All Angels, and responded with "surprising generosity."

Drawing on local resources

"This is not simply a matter of providing food," Melin said. "In serving we are also blessed--sharing some stories of their struggle and their faith." Visitors notice that the volunteers--several students from Kenya, an Asian family, several members of the parish--serve the steaming trays of food (each worth a month's pension these days), and pause for conversation and bask in the smiles and touches of gratitude.

"We are very worried about the many students who are caught in Moscow with stipends that no longer provide enough to eat," Melin observed. While aimed mainly at the elderly, he said that the program is now able to supply some food for the students each week.

While acknowledging that a massive international effort is essential, Melin said that the program draws on local resources, without interference of

the bureaucracy. And it provides a well-balanced meal for less than 15 cents apiece. By using local cafeterias that would otherwise be closed, it also helps employees keep their jobs.

"We don't own this program," Melin said in reporting that a French humanitarian agency is ready to adopt the model. "We just found our own small way to make a contribution to a very obvious need. In the process it has helped remind us of who we are as a Christian community."

Editor's note: If you want to know more about the program, contact the Rev. John Melin in care of the American Embassy, Moscow (Admin.) APO AE 09721.

92043

Locked in their churches for 70 years, Russian Christians reach out to society

by James Solheim

To step from the gray, cheerless world of a Moscow winter into the warm, embracing liturgy of a Russian cathedral is to step directly into the light and mystery that has kept Russian Christians nourished during the 70-year nightmare of Communist persecution.

The Patriarchal Cathedral of the Epiphany is ablaze with hundreds of candles reflecting off golden walls and vestments. The eyes of a hundred icons glare down on the congregation and seem to capture all the pain and piety that have carried this worshiping community safely through a thousand years of history to this new day of rebirth and restoration.

People of all ages stand tightly packed into the space, their sober but hopeful faces following the priests and bishops as they intone the ancient liturgy in Old Church Slavonic.

The rich music of several choirs high in the balconies sweeps over the congregation as they bow and cross themselves constantly in ancient signs of devotion. The distinctive deep bass voices of the chanting seem to reinforce the deep pain of a collective memory of persecution and martyrdom that threatened to snuff out the flame during the Stalin years.

Searching for their souls

Today it is no longer dangerous to attend the divine liturgy or admit that one is a believer. In fact, it is almost fashionable to identify with the church. The result is a crush of interest among those who are seeking meaning now that the props of communism and atheism have disappeared. Leaders of the church perform dozens of baptisms and weddings every Sunday.

Suzanne Massie of Harvard University's Center for Russian Studies, a member of the joint coordinating committee that promotes cooperation between the Episcopal Church and the Russian Church, said that "it is often said that the church is Russia and Russia is the church." Having shaken off the Communist model of humanity, believers "now want their souls back." She pointed out that the church "is the only institution with an unbroken link throughout Russian history and therefore is the only source of identity."

"Russians cannot exist without the church, without a spiritual life--that is their glory," Massie told a group of Episcopal communicators the day they left for an official eight-day visit to Russia at the invitation of the patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. "Russians are searching through the rubble of communism for their lost souls."

The faithful--and the curious

That search is obvious on the faces of those who prowl the back of the cathedral where the faithful and the curious gather around side altars. Some press their prayer petitions into the hands of the priests and pay their kopeks to purchase candles that are lighted by the ever-present nuns swathed in black. Others stand motionless, with a quizzical look on their faces as though they had little idea of what all this spectacle signified.

In a corner, a long line gathers for the blessing of the priest and an opportunity to kiss the cross he offers to the congregation. Among those who press forward are elderly men and women with fear and confusion written across their faces. Young parents, some of them surprisingly well-dressed for a society in economic turmoil, hold up their children for a blessing.

After the two-hour service, the faithful gather in the brown slush outside the cathedral for an opportunity to talk with the priests and receive a blessing or perhaps a word of encouragement or consolation.

Near the entry to the cathedral groups of beggars reach out gnarled hands, hoping for a few kopeks from people as they leave. Their heart-wrenching faces look as though they are masks representing the pain and suffering of the whole Russian people during the years of silence and persecution. Most people avert their eyes as they scurry past.

New-found freedoms

After being locked behind closed doors for all these years, Russian Christians are enjoying their new-found freedoms, sometimes in cautious disbelief.

On this particular Sunday we witness something quite extraordinary, even historic--a group of parents and children gather to process through the streets to consecrate a refurbished Sunday school building. Led by the ever-present icons that are so precious to these believers, the participants move slowly, carrying flowers and wearing apprehensive smiles. A priest stops traffic, and a crowd of the curious soon gathers to observe this new wonder. Some scowl and others nod in approval as the procession enters the building.

Jammed into the hallway, around a small altar, the dean of the cathedral leads a solemn dedication service, dipping crosses into holy water. The children are wide-eyed and attentive, but a few fidget and are stroked affectionately by the priests and assured that the service is almost over.

At the end of the service, the dean carries a basin of holy water into the crowd, and the children erupt in laughter as they are generously splashed with a liquid blessing. Before moving off to their classrooms, parents and children stop to share with each other their astonishment on this historic occasion and to wonder how many others are gathering at Sunday schools, just like this one, throughout the vast and holy land.

Mother church is finally able to gather her brood to her loving bosom without fear of reprisal or persecution.

92044

Four years after marking a millennium, Russian Christians see a lifetime of changes

by Charles Long

In 1988, when the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated its millennium, the thaw in its relations with the Communist state was just beginning. Now the water flows freely, but there are still plenty of icebergs. The Party is dissolved, but the hated bureaucracy is still in place.

In the church, an impressive group of younger leaders is beginning to

emerge, full of plans and dreams for the future. Many of the senior bishops, however, chosen for their conservatism and acceptability to the KGB, are still in charge. In 1988 the patriarch was an ailing old man, not much more than a figurehead. Now there is a vigorous new patriarch, but he has to deal with tensions and opportunities not even dreamed of five years ago.

In 1988, when I arrived with an American delegation invited by the Russian Orthodox Church to help celebrate its millennium, all was in confusion. We never did meet the church leaders we expected to meet. They had all withdrawn to consult, in fear and trembling, about how to respond to Gorbachev's invitation to help draft a new law to govern the exercise of religion in the Soviet Union, to lift restrictions on the church, and to define its rights. The plans for entertaining American visitors had been forgotten.

Overwhelmed by opportunities

At that time, only a few churches and monasteries had been handed back, and the church was just beginning the restoration of Moscow's Danilov Monastery, which was to serve as its national headquarters. Now that task has been handsomely completed, but 6,000 more churches and institutions have been returned by the state, most in ruins or disrepair, and the church, without adequate resources, is overwhelmed by its opportunities.

Four years later in 1992 we noticed many positive changes. The cathedral service we attended was crowded as before--but there seemed to be a better balance of men and women, old and young. For the first time, teenagers were taking part in the service as acolytes. The congregation paid more attention to the sermon, which they seemed to regard as religious instruction directed to them. The two-hour liturgy was followed by fellowship in the courtyard (in 1988 the faithful old women were visibly suspicious and hostile to visitors) and then an hour of Sunday school.

In addition, the development of new social services for youth, orphans, handicapped people, the elderly, and demobilized soldiers gave evidence that the Russian Orthodox Church was not merely trying to restore the conditions that existed before the revolution of 1917. Even in a time of inflation, hunger, and social instability, the church seems determined to move forward into a new era.

--Charles Long is director of Forward Movement Publications. He traveled to Russia with the team of Episcopal journalists.

92045

Anglicans and Orthodox have history of cooperation

by J. Robert Wright

Anglican encounters with the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity seem to extend back as far as the very first archbishop of Canterbury, St. Augustine, who arrived in England in the late sixth century bearing as his standard an image of Christ "painted on a board," what we might call today an icon. Over the succeeding centuries Anglican contacts with the Orthodox have been many and varied.

The Episcopal Church opened a new era of Anglican relations with the Eastern churches in 1862 when the General Convention established the "Russo-Greek Committee" for the purpose of seeking fresh contacts with and information about the Orthodox. An official delegation was sent to Moscow, theological memoranda were published, and regular reports offered to successive General Conventions.

The Episcopal Church was the first member of the Anglican Communion to take a step so direct and official.

In March 1865 Episcopalians provided the use of a chapel for what was most likely the first public celebration of the Orthodox liturgy in New York. The Episcopal chapel is now the Serbian Cathedral of St. Sava.

In 1905 Archbishop Tikhon of North America and the Aleutian Islands --an early Orthodox leader in mission, education, and ecumenism--was given an honorary doctorate from Nashotah House. Following the Russian Revolution, Tikhon reestablished the Moscow Patriarchate and in 1989 was canonized a saint.

Official theological conversations between Anglicans and the Orthodox have accelerated in the last few decades. An official theological consultation was established in the United States in 1962 and an international doctrinal commission in 1966. The last three presiding bishops have made official visits to the Russian church, and the Orthodox have sent delegations in 1963, 1979, and 1990. St. Sergius, patron saint of Russia and the founder of the monastery of the Holy Trinity in what was Zagorsk, is now commemorated in the new liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer.

--J. Robert Wright is St. Mark's professor of ecclesiastical history at the General Theological Seminary in New York.

92046

New dean at National Cathedral calls for building effort of 'ministry and outreach'

The new dean of the Washington National Cathedral, the Very Rev. Nathan Baxter, called on the cathedral community to begin a new building effort of expanded mission and outreach.

"After 83 years of building stone upon stone, we are shifting our emphasis to the building of our ministry and outreach in this community and the nation," Baxter said at a press conference prior to his installation as dean of the Washington National Cathedral on February 13.

"We must continue to focus our attention, energy, and resources to fulfilling the vision of the cathedral as a 'house of prayer for all people, the chief mission church of the Diocese of Washington, and a great church for national purposes,'" Baxter said.

Baxter's installation was scheduled on the day that the Episcopal Church commemorates the ministry of Absalom Jones, the church's first African-American priest. An African American himself, Baxter said that the cathedral should draw on the "courageous witness of Absalom Jones" for inspiration as it seeks to address the challenges ahead.

Calling for greater attention by the cathedral to the "moral and spiritual implications of the violence which plagues our cities," Baxter said that the cathedral must use its resources and influence "to work with and support parishes, municipal leaders, and others who are trying to address what our mayor rightly calls a 'war of values.'"

Baxter also said that the cathedral, which sits on the highest hill overlooking the seat of government, must do more to address the role of religion in dealing with national issues. "We will not slack from our responsibility to address the role of religious faith in helping our nation deal with and respond to the social, political, and moral challenges of our times."

Bagpipes, drums, and fourth-century England

Lay leaders and clergy from across the nation and the Church of England participated in Baxter's installation ceremony, a service that blended the sound of Scottish bagpipes, African drums, the cathedral carillon, and liturgical elements that can be traced back to fourth-century England.

In addition to serving as dean of the cathedral, Baxter also becomes chief administrative officer of the Cathedral Foundation, which oversees the Beauvoir Elementary School, the National Cathedral School for Girls, St.

Albans School, the College of Preachers, and the College of the Laity. Baxter will also serve as titular head of the National Cathedral Association, which has over 23,000 members in regional chapters across the country.

Prior to his election as dean, Baxter served as the administrative dean and associate professor of pastoral theology at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and priest associate at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Cambridge. Previously he was dean and associate professor of church and ministry at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He also served as chaplain and professor of philosophy and religion at historically black St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia.

--based on reports by Bob Becker, director of public affairs at the Washington National Cathedral, and Nancy Montgomery, a freelance writer in Washington, D.C.

92047

Spong testifies on behalf of gay priest in Toronto trial

by Jerry Hames

Celibacy is not a choice that the church can impose on its priests but a calling that must be freely accepted, Bishop John Spong of Newark told an ecclesiastical court in Canada.

Spong testified before the five-member panel on behalf of the Rev. James Ferry, a 39-year-old Anglican priest who was on trial for disobeying his bishop and refusing to end a committed, homosexual relationship.

Spong's appearance came near the end of the six-day trial in which lawyers for the diocese maintained that Bishop Terence Findlay acted in accordance with guidelines of the Canadian House of Bishops by removing Ferry from his pulpit in Unionville, a small town northeast of Toronto.

At issue was the question of a bishop's authority and discipline as well as the concept of collegiality among the bishops who approved guidelines in 1979 that the Anglican Church of Canada accepts all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, as equal before God. But, the guidelines say, candidates for

ordination must agree to abstain from same-sex activity.

The authority of the guidelines was at issue because the House of Bishops is not a legislative body of the church and General Synod has never faced the issue.

The Toronto bishop's lawyer contended that the guidelines are binding on all bishops in order that they can act together and preserve collegiality.

Spong told the bishop's court that he honors those persons who have chosen celibacy, including St. Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa. However, for the church to impose celibacy on a person as a condition for ordination can be seriously damaging, Spong said. "We are not talking about a choice between celibacy and promiscuity," Spong said, "but [between celibacy and] a faithful, loving, life-giving, committed relationship."

Ferry, married in 1975 but separated three years later, said that he did not consider himself a homosexual when he was ordained in 1981. "I was in a state of denial," he asserted.

Ferry said that he confessed his homosexuality to his bishop after a small group at the parish tried to blackmail him into resigning. "It was a homophobic witch hunt," he said.

The defense has sought to show that Ferry's ministry was not adversely affected because of his relationship and that he continued to be appreciated and valued by many in the congregation. More than 100 spectators attended the proceedings, many of whom wore pink triangles, symbolizing their support for gay rights.

A judgment by the court is pending.

—Jerry Hames is editor of *Episcopal Life*.

92048

Connecticut churches using ecumenical baptismal certificates

by Gerald Renner

In a step that symbolizes a stride toward unity, leaders of the major Christian churches in Connecticut announced agreement Friday on a baptismal certificate that Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox pastors can use in common.

The certificate underlines a historic international agreement that churches reached a decade ago that recognizes the validity of each other's rite of initiation into the Christian faith.

It formally ended centuries of interchurch squabbling over the meaning of baptism and such issues as the validity of baptizing infants versus adults and whether a person should be "sprinkled" or "immersed."

"We believe that our ecumenical baptismal certificate is the first of its kind in the country," said the Rev. Stephen J. Sidorak, Jr., executive director of the Christian Conference of Connecticut.

Leaders of denominations representing more than 2,500 churches in Connecticut approved the ecumenical certificate and said that they will encourage pastors to use it instead of a denominational one.

Episcopal Bishop Arthur E. Walmsley of Connecticut said that he would "encourage its use in Episcopal churches, as I know my colleagues in other traditions have done for their constituents."

Based on common understanding

Use of the certificate "witnesses to the unity we already share in Christ," said Roman Catholic Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Norwich.

The Rev. Kim-Eric Williams, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Manchester, proposed the idea for the certificate to the Christian Conference. The idea did not originate with him, Williams said, but is something that has been done since 1980 in Trinidad, where he was a missionary.

Many years of theological dialogue among church representatives resulted in their common understanding of baptism, said Williams, Connecticut representative of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For example, he said, many Baptist churches that immerse a person bodily now recognize the validity of baptism by sprinkling only a person's head, as is done commonly in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran,

Episcopal, and other sacramental churches.

"They found out that sprinkling began when the church moved north of the Alps and it got too cold to immerse," Williams said. The sacramental churches have always recognized the validity of baptism by immersion, he said.

Similarly, many churches that baptize only people old enough to make a personal commitment have developed "dedication" ceremonies for infants, in which the infant is received into the Christian community. The churches have come to understand that each one asks a person to make a personal commitment to Christ at some point, Williams said. That is generally done at confirmation in churches that baptize infants.

Historic living document

The mutual understanding of Christian baptism was part of a document on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, which was agreed to in Lima, Peru, in 1982 by representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. It had been years in the making.

The document was "one step in developing a theological consensus of central elements of the Christian faith," said G. Donald Ferree, ecumenical officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

Ferree was chairman of a year-and-a-half study of the Lima document by members of the Christian Conference of Connecticut.

"For years, most Christians have recognized one another's baptisms in principle, but in practice the focus was on the particular congregation or at most the communion or 'church' into which one was baptized. Study of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry led the members of ChrisCon to realize this was not enough," Ferree said.

Other denominations agreeing to use the certificate are the Connecticut Missionary Baptist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Evangelical Covenant Church of America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, and United Methodist Church.

The certificate attests that a person was "baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," an ancient, common formula. On the left side of the certificate is a multicolored design symbolic of the Trinity, Christ, and the water of baptism.

--Gerald Renner is religion writer at the *Hartford Courant*. This article is excerpted with permission from the January 25 issue of the *Courant*. Please credit the *Courant* appropriately if you intend to reprint the article.

92049

Roman Catholics want their church, but as Episcopalians

by Marie Rohde

Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church in Conrath, Wisconsin, has long been the heart and soul of that town of 92 residents.

When Roman Catholic Bishop Raphael M. Fliss announced that the 76-year-old church had to be closed because of a shortage of priests, the initial reaction was predictable--people were angry.

But the next response from several of Holy Trinity's parishioners was not expected. They decided they wanted to become Episcopalians. And they want to buy the church.

"When we first told them [the Roman Catholic diocese] that we were going to be forming our own church, they just laughed and said no one would show up if we held a second meeting," recalled George Schwerzel, 70, a longstanding member of Holy Trinity.

"Well, we held the second meeting, and just as many people showed up, and it's gaining momentum. That scared them, and now they're pussyfooting around, sending us all letters, trying to bring us back into the fold."

For Schwerzel and others, the Roman Catholic Church's efforts have been too little, too late.

Not true, said Fliss, head of the Diocese of Superior, which had to close 15 other parishes. But the perception is still strong.

Father Paul Walter, an Episcopal priest who has a mission in nearby Ladysmith, is leading the community. Those interested in becoming Episcopalians have been invited to attend a series of weekly classes.

Holy Trinity officially closed on December 31. Although the church has been vacant since, and unused except for two funerals and a baptism, a number of its former members have been attending services at the Congregational church, the only other congregation in town.

A portent for the church?

The move to the Episcopal Church, according to church history experts, is rare. But what's happening in Conrath could be a sign of things to come for the Roman Catholic Church as the number of priests continues to dwindle.

The Diocese of Superior covers 16 counties in northwestern Wisconsin, a total area of 15,715 square miles. It has 68 priests serving 115 parishes and missions and 19 priests working in nonparish ministries. By 2000, the diocese expects to have only 45 active priests for a population of 83,000 Roman Catholics.

Fliss said that the decision to close the parish was made after years of difficult deliberations.

The events have created an uncomfortable situation for Episcopal Bishop William Wantland, whose diocese covers the northwestern part of the state. He and Fliss are two of the three bishops who lead a statewide organization intended to improve relations among Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Episcopalians.

Wantland said that members of the Conrath congregation approached his priest in Ladysmith. "We told [members of the congregation] that if there were some theological reasons that would make this desirable for them, and if they would otherwise be without any pastoral care, we would talk to them," Wantland said. "We're not saying that every time you close a parish we will be there to snap it up."

Crossing over to the Episcopal Church might be easier for some of the Conrath Roman Catholics than for others, Wantland said.

About half the congregation had been members of a Polish National Catholic Church, which traditionally had strong ties to the Anglican Communion, an autonomous group of churches throughout the world that evolved from the Church of England.

The Anglican Communion is united by a common loyalty to the archbishop of Canterbury, its titular leader. Polish National priests can serve in the English wing of the church, but relations with the Episcopal Church in the United States have been strained for more than a decade, because the American church allows the ordination of women, Wantland said. This historic connection makes the move of members of Holy Trinity to the Episcopal Church more natural, he added.

Of the 52 families in the parish, 11 have joined the Roman Catholic church in Ladysmith, about 10 miles away, 15 have expressed a desire to become Episcopalians, and 26 are waiting to see how things turn out, Wantland said.

--Marie Rohde is religion reporter at the *Milwaukee Journal*. This excerpt is reprinted with permission from the February 2 edition of the *Milwaukee Journal*. Please credit the *Journal* appropriately if you intend to reprint the story.

92050

Cardinal Cassidy calls for cooperation in evangelizing Europe

The Vatican's top ecumenical officer said during an official visit to the United States that the new situation in Central and Eastern Europe challenges churches to practice "ecumenical discernment, dialogue, and service."

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, pointed to a special assembly of European bishops last November as "an effort to listen and deliberate on issues of this historic moment." Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox church leaders attended as "fraternal delegates."

The Russian Orthodox did not send delegates and accused the Vatican of "open proselytizing" in the former Soviet Union. Patriarch Alexy II said that cooperation with the Vatican was not possible "until relations between our two churches have been redefined." The patriarch has made it clear that he is deeply offended by the appointment of five new Roman Catholic bishops for the former Soviet Union, including an archbishop for Moscow.

Cassidy said that the European bishops agreed that the evangelization of Europe should be done "by Christian communions working together." In a news conference at the National Council of Churches, Cassidy said, "We need to insist on such basic Gospel values as accepting each other as brothers and overcoming the past in a spirit of forgiveness."

Among theological issues that need more attention, Cassidy cited disagreement with the Anglicans on the understanding of the church and who exercises authority. He denied that the Vatican's recent response to the report from the first Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue was negative but added that the ordination of women is "a big obstacle in our relationship."

The cardinal made an informal visit to the Episcopal Church Center to meet with Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and the Rev. William Norgren, the church's ecumenical officer. "It was basically an opportunity for the cardinal and the presiding bishop to become better acquainted and open some lines of communication," Norgren said. He added that Cassidy amplified his earlier remarks about the emerging situation in Eastern Europe, the tensions with the Orthodox, and some of the obstacles in Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.



news briefs

92051

Church of England dioceses voting on women priests

A statistical report submitted to the Church of England's General Synod meeting in February indicated that 38 of the church's 44 dioceses have voted in favor of the ordination of women. The report revealed that over two thirds of the laity and somewhat fewer of the clergy now favor women priests. However, 21 of the dioceses voting in favor fell short of the two-thirds majority that will be required in November when the synod takes its deciding vote on the issue. "Nearly 7,000 [people] took part in diocesan synod voting..., so these figures carry real weight," said David McLean, chairman of the synod's House of Laity. In June, the House of Bishops will forge a final draft of the legislation, and the General Synod will debate the issue in July.

Gay clergy in England are said to oppose women priests

With the Church of England's final vote on the ordination of women only nine months away, a woman deacon in central London has charged that homosexual clergy are the source of much of the opposition to women priests. The Rev. Nerissa Jones, curate of St. Botolph's, Aldgate, also contended that a third of London priests are homosexual, with only a few of those being celibate. Jones, a grandmother, said in a BBC interview that "if men cannot openly accept their homosexuality, they are more likely to be antagonistic to women." The Diocese of London has been at the forefront of opposition to women priests. Richard Kirker, of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement [in England], said: "There are undoubtedly more lesbian and gay clergy in London than in any other diocese. You cannot with credibility argue for the ordination of women and not homosexuals, or vice versa."

Carey to visit German churches in March

Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey will visit the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) during March 8-12. The EKD is a federation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches. The announcement of Carey's plans comes on the heels of the Meissen Agreement, which committed the Church of England and the EKD to step up their efforts to achieve full visible unity. Carey is scheduled to meet with members of the EKD's council at the church's headquarters in Hanover and leaders of regional churches in Hanover, Dresden, and Stuttgart.

Sexuality and the economy are top Methodist concerns

Paralleling trends in both the Episcopal Church and society at large, delegates to the United Methodist Church's forthcoming General Conference ranked sexuality, the nation's economy, and racism high on their list of concerns. The poll, conducted by mail late last year, found that homosexuality, church finances, poverty, abortion, church structure and organization, baptism, drugs, and race relations were among the most pressing issues in the view of delegates. The study also determined that 54 percent of lay delegates and 40 percent of clergy define themselves as "generally" conservative, up slightly from 1988 figures.

Florida grand jury charges transient in church arsons

A federal grand jury in Tallahassee, Florida, charged Patrick Lee Frank, a 41-year-old Tennessee transient, for 16 church fires set last year, including several in Episcopal parishes. Frank was recently indicted for four other counts of church arson by a federal grand jury in Tennessee, where he was jailed on November 13 on trespassing and loitering charges. On January 31, a judge found Frank incompetent to stand trial for the latter charges on grounds that he suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, delusions, and hallucinations. Frank, also a suspect in church fires in Denver, has denied all the allegations. He will be arraigned before a U.S. magistrate in both states, and is expected to have a competency hearing on the federal charges. Seven of the Florida fires occurred in Gainesville.

Oregon paper drops Indian-related sports names

Portland, Oregon's largest daily newspaper, *The Oregonian*, discontinued printing Indian-related nicknames of several sports teams on February 16. Editor William A. Hilliard said that such names "tend to perpetuate stereotypes that damage the dignity and self-respect of many people in our society and...this harm far transcends any innocent entertainment or

promotional value these names may have." The paper's new policy applies to the Atlanta "Braves," Cleveland "Indians," Washington "Redskins," and St. John's University "Redmen," though other names may be added later. While the decision was applauded by Clyde Bellecourt, a founder of the Minneapolis-based American Indian Movement, a spokesman for the Cleveland Indians defended his team's name on the grounds of "historical significance." The American League team said that the nickname *Indians* honors former Cleveland player Louis F. Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian from Maine who is listed as the first Native American to play major league baseball. The nickname was chosen in a 1914 newspaper contest, a year after Sockalexis' death.

Egyptian author sentenced for blasphemy

As the world marked the third anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death sentence against Salman Rushdie, a little-known Egyptian writer faced probable imprisonment after his conviction under the state's blasphemy laws. Alaa Hamed, a 53-year-old tax inspector and part-time writer, was sentenced--along with his printer and publisher--to eight years in prison for writing *A Distance in a Man's Mind*. The book, a fantasy novel that sold less than 100 copies, concludes with its protagonist challenging the validity of religious laws during an extended trial. The Islamic Research Academy of the Cairo-based Al-Azhar University, the world's oldest theological institute and the arbiter of Sunni Muslim orthodoxy, prompted Egypt's state prosecutor to initiate the legal proceedings. If Prime Minister Atef Sedki adds his signature to the court's order, the three will become the first to be incarcerated for a work of literature since Egypt officially stopped censoring books in 1977. In the meantime, Hamed has been dismissed from his job and threatened with death by Islamic fundamentalists. "My only crime," Hamed said, "is that I allowed myself to think."

Condom vending machines criticized in Asia

Religious leaders in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, have objected to a health ministry plan to install condom-dispensing machines in nightspots to reduce the spread of AIDS. A Muslim leader, Zainal Abidin, said the proposal runs counter to the teachings of Islam, and Roman Catholic Archbishop Soter Fernandez said that the use of condoms was an "immoral" act that would not "in any way curtail the spread of AIDS."

Materials issued on Columbus quincentenary

A packet of materials offering a Christian perspective on the legacy of Christopher Columbus' "discoveries" in the Americas has been issued by the Episcopal Council of Indian Ministries and mailed to diocesan offices, parish congregations in Provinces I-VIII, and ecumenical partners. The packet contains meditations, background resource pieces, 17" x 23" posters, and worship materials that include liturgical resources, bulletin inserts, and litanies for use during this Lenten season. For further information on the availability of individual items and their cost, contact Episcopal Parish Services, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017-4594; telephone (212) 661-1253 or (800) 334-7626.

Church of England's sexuality statement soon available

Issues in Human Sexuality, the recent statement by the House of Bishops of the Church of England's General Synod, will be issued by Morehouse Publishing in mid-March. The 48-page booklet includes sections on "Scripture and Human Sexuality," "The Christian Vision for Human Sexuality," "The Phenomenon of Homosexual Love," and "The Homophile in the Life and Fellowship of the Church." *Issues in Human Sexuality* costs \$4.95 and is available in bookstores or through Morehouse Publishing at (800) 877-0012.

PEOPLE

The Rev. Canon Gethin B. Hughes was elected bishop of the Diocese of San Diego on the third ballot at a convention held on February 15. He will succeed Bishop C. Brinkley Morton, who retired for health reasons. Hughes, a native of Wales, has been rector of All Saints, Santa Barbara, since 1980. He holds a master of divinity degree from Seabury-Western, and previously worked as a social worker and teacher. Hughes is scheduled to be consecrated as the third bishop of San Diego in June.

The Rev. Jay E. Johnson (Graduate Theological Union), **the Rev. Victoria C. Miller** (General Theological Seminary), **the Rev. Linda Naef** (Harvard University), **Judith H. Newman** (Harvard University), **James W. Perkinson** (University of Chicago), and **the Rev. Mark J. Pruitt** (Cambridge University) are Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) fellowship recipients for doctoral study during the 1992-93 academic year. Like that of all ECF Fellows, the

goal of each of these scholars is to teach in an Episcopal seminary in the United States following graduation. The ECF also awarded continuing fellowships to 14 other students for the 1992-93 academic year.

Chris Telfer was elected president of Coalition 14 at the group's annual meeting. She is the first lay person and first woman to hold that post, having previously served as the coalition's treasurer. Telfer is a certified public accountant who maintains a private practice in Bend, Oregon.

Photos available for this issue of ENS:

1. Russians worship on ashes of atheism (92040)
2. Onion domes return to the Russian landscape (92040)
3. Russians flock to newly opened churches (92040)
4. Russians rebuilding churches and monasteries (92041)
5. Protestants in Moscow sponsor soup kitchens (92042)
6. Russian Church faces huge educational task (92043)
7. Russian churches opening Sunday schools (92043)
8. Trinity Institute scholars discuss imagination (92052)

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Tentative mailing dates for future ENS releases are March 7 and March 21.



news features

92052

At Trinity Institute, scholars say imagination is antidote to chaos

by Jan Nunley and Jeffrey Penn

How can the Christian community search for meaning in a rapidly changing world? How should Christian theologians address the ecological crisis facing the earth? Two scholars at the recent 23rd Trinity Institute in New York suggested answers that could be reduced to a proverb: A vivid imagination is an antidote to chaos.

This proverb, spelled out by Walter Brueggemann, professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and Sallie McFague, Carpenter professor of theology at the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University, responded to the institute's theme, "Imagination: Reconstructing Reality."

Brueggemann told the institute's 500 participants that the Western world is in a crisis of monumental proportions, "the end of modernity," a "new interpretative situation which constitutes something of an emergency."

Brueggemann traced what he called the "hegemony of male certitude," a political and social order in the Western world, to 17th-century Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. This order, he asserted, gave rise to the modern dominance of science and technology; of reliance on facts, reason, and logic to the exclusion of other kinds of knowledge.

The modern order, Brueggemann said, elevated the concept of the individual, making the "self" the absolute point of reference at the expense of the community; emphasized the pursuit of "pure reason" as an objective goal; and degenerated all things physical and feminine to the rational and masculine.

Brueggemann asserted that this view has often been maintained by "coercion" and "brutality," and that it continues to dominate in the West.

Sweeping aside old notions

However, Brueggemann insisted that new ways of thinking in the "post-modern world" are sweeping aside notions that science and established facts are "objective." Scientific knowledge, he said, "is political and rhetorical achievement," not objective reading of data. "The old ways of knowing no longer command respect as being objectively true."

Brueggemann insisted that this new viewpoint is a reversal of Enlightenment assumptions, and that the new viewpoint tends to give credence to what is oral, rather than written; what is particular, rather than "universal"; what is local, rather than general; and what is timely, rather than what is timeless. He charged that the emerging postmodern world is challenging all assumptions--and the resulting chaos, what he called "a desperate maneuver to cope with anxiety"--is buffeting the Christian community.

Church as a leaven to the dominant view

It is the church's job, declared Brueggemann, to "fund" the postmodern imagination of Christians, providing through liturgy, symbol, and community the scriptural leaven that transforms and provides a "counter-story" to the dominant worldview.

That counter-story, Brueggemann said, must shift from an obsession with the "timeless present"--an idolization of the instant gratification of consumerism--to a perspective in which the past and future are honored. It confesses, not self-reliance and mastery, but fragility and dependence on God, whose justice is extended to those who lack power.

The church should be "that odd community, with all its pathology, that keeps raising questions... to be odd in the world is God's intention," Brueggemann said. It is also a vision of the future, "not [of] the same getting better, but of the newness out of God's freedom.... God will not quit until God has had God's full way with the world," a vision that neither doctrinaire conservatives nor die-hard liberals will necessarily welcome.

As Christians seek to address the world, they have a key resource of imagination-provoking stories in Scripture. Brueggemann criticized attempts by scholars to interpret the Bible with historical analysis as "text killers." Historical criticism is a modern way of getting rid of the "subversive, outrageous, preposterous stuff" in the Bible, Brueggemann charged.

"Don't tell congregations what the text should mean," said Brueggemann; let it work in the congregations's imagination as they insert

themselves into the story, the "counter-drama," and play out the drama of their own lives. Sunday morning, he concluded, should be a "safe place" for this work of imagination, so that it can be carried out and lived in the world.

Imagination as antidote to ecological crisis

McFague declared that the current ecological crisis challenges Christians to confess how "dire the situation is...." She said that there is an urgent need to address the crisis theologically, what she called a "universal planetary agenda," to reverse environmental degradation. "Good theology does not stay in heaven, but comes to earth," she said.

The Christian tradition, McFague said, has been male-centered and human-centered, especially since the 17th century, and is the result of a mindset that refuses to acknowledge the sacredness of all creatures and leads to the extinction of species. One antidote for the crisis, she said, was the use of imagination to "re-vision" metaphors of God.

The problem, McFague said, is that the imagery of God as king--a distant, almighty Super-person--has not been recognized as a metaphor or a picture, but as a description. She pointed out that all references to God are metaphors, that no human image "describes" God.

Universe as God's body

The central thesis of McFague's theory was the presentation of the "universe as the body of God." Concern with the body isn't foreign to Christians, whose religion is "the religion of the body par excellence...the religion of the Incarnation," McFague said.

If bodies matter, then McFague asked, is it possible to speak of the body of God? If God is embodied in the universe, which is "enlivened by the breath of God," then "we literally live and move and have our being in God." Such a model is not pantheistic, said McFague, but *panentheistic*, a belief that God is embodied "not necessarily or totally--but sacramentally" in creation.

McFague said that she hopes the model will "press us to wonder and identification with suffering bodies and with Christ--with "the least of these, which must include creatures and the planet itself.... God is not the controller of the universe, but the enlivener." She called on the church to develop a theology that "is concerned with the relationship between God and the planet," not the distance between them.

Imagination as a call to action

Both Brueggemann and McFague insisted that imagination is an antidote for Christians disoriented by the rapidly changing and ecologically fragile

world. It is an imagination centered in God promise, not in human structures of society. However, this is not a suggestion that imagination is a passive daydream, but an active charge to subvert old assumptions that obstruct God's intention for the world.

For McFague, an imaginative new metaphor for God might "help us to support life on the planet, rather than control it. We must come to value the earth," she said. "There is a tight connection between ecology and justice issues."

Brueggemann asserted that "the church is one of the last places to honor the ambiguity and complexities of human life." He called on the church to assert "a world that stands under God's full promise, a world that is cared for and not orphaned."

Challenge is for the parish

"Imagination does not grow when we try only to paint the big picture; it grows when we get into the details so that somebody else might be able to receive something from it," said the Rev. Canon Carolyn Gibson of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis, a participant at the meeting. "The challenge here is to open our minds, and that affects every aspect of parish life."

--Jan Nunley is a freelance writer and a student at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

